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The Record, \$1

The IRON TRAIL

By

REX BEACH

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SYNOPSIS

Murray O'Neil, railroad builder, on his way to Alaska, is a passenger on the Nebraska. The ship runs aground. O'Neil helps Captain Johnson Brennan to quell a panic among the passengers.

As the ship settles O'Neil is accosted by a beautiful girl, and he plunges overboard with her. They are picked up by Captain Brennan. She proves to be Natalie Gerard, whose mother is the friend of Curtis Gordon, O'Neil's unscrupulous business rival.

O'Neil and Natalie journey to Hope to gether. She tells him of her mother and Gordon. When they arrive at Hope Gordon meets them.

O'Neil is impressed with the magnetism of his rival, but is sure his plans are unshaken. Tom Slater, quite a different person, they go to Curtis in time to save Dan Appleton in a crooked card game. Appleton, an engineer, had worked for Gordon. He owes his fortunes to O'Neil. O'Neil leads his men to a wild country, convinced he can build a railroad up the Salmon river.

Eliza Appleton is sent to Omar to expose the men who are trying to match control of an empire. She meets her brother and Natalie. Dan is worried over a possible newspaper attack by Eliza on O'Neil.

There's a scene when Curtis Gordon asks Eliza to be his wife. Eliza, who has been told by Natalie that she has money and he needs her in his scheme.

In her extremity Mrs. Gerard listens to Natalie's plea to go to the Irish prince. O'Neil finds places for them in his new hotel. Gordon, thoroughly enraged, plans to cripple O'Neil.

Dan tells his sister he is desperately in love with Natalie and asks her to win O'Neil, as he considers him a rival. Dan goes out with a car of dynamite and holds a canyon threatened by Gordon's men.

O'Neil takes the girls on a trip to Jackson Glacier. He decides to make a perilous voyage in a skiff down the Salmon river. Eliza, despite his pleadings, accompanies him.

Dan Appleton accepts O'Neil's offer of \$1000 to the man who will cut a cable in the work done by Gordon. After cutting the cable Appleton is rescued by a crowd of Gordon's men, but is rescued by O'Neil's men.

When Dan tells Natalie that with the \$1000 he means to buy her an engagement ring she says she's sorry; that he has made a great mistake. Eliza consoles Dan.

Starting for New York, O'Neil tells Eliza he has the key to a kingdom. Gordon tells Natalie he is ready to marry her mother. In New York the Heilmannes refuse to back O'Neil.

When things look darkest for O'Neil in New York he gets the backing of Poultney, an English capitalist. Dan and Eliza, with their savings, pay off the laborers at Omar and prevent a walkout. Gordon plans new attack.

"That's pretty bad, isn't it?" "It certainly is. It threatens to throw everything out of alignment and prevent us from laying the steel if we don't check it."

"Check it?" cried Eliza. "How can you check a thing like that?" "Easily enough, if we can share the hands, by cutting away the ice where it is frozen to the piles, so that it won't lift them with it. The trouble is to get men enough. You see, the ice is nine feet thick now. I've set every man to work with axes and chisels and steam planes, and I came up to telephone Slater for more help. We'll have to work fast, night and day."

"There's nobody left in Omar," Eliza said quickly.

"I know. Tom's going to gather all he can at Cortez and Hope and rush them out here. Our task is to keep the ice cut away until help arrives."

"I suppose it's too late in the season to repair any serious damage."

"Exactly. If you care to go back



O'Neil Stumbled in Upon Her in the Midst of Her Task.

"with me you can see what we're doing." As they set off for the bridge site Murray looked down at Eliza, smiling manly beside him, with something of affectionate appreciation in his eyes, and said humbly: "It was careless of me not to see what you have been doing for me all this time. My only excuse is that I've been driven half mad with other things. I haven't time to think of myself."

"All housekeepers have a thankless task," laughed Eliza.

All that day Eliza watched the unequal struggle, and in the evening Dan brought her reports that were far from

reassuring. The relentless movement showed no sign of ceasing. When she retired that night she sought ease from her anxiety in a prayer that was half a petition for O'Neil's success and half an exceedingly full and frank confession of her love for him. Outside, beneath the glare of torches and hastily strung incandescents, a weary army toiled stubbornly, digging, gouging, chopping at the foot of the towering wall of timbers which stretched across the Salmon. In the north the aurora borealis played brilliantly as if to light a council of the gods.

CHAPTER XXII.

Final Preparations.

ON the following day Happy Tom arrived with fifty men.

"I got the last mother's son I could find," he explained as he warmed himself at O'Neil's stove.

"Did you go to Hope?"

"I did, and I saw the spavins himself."

"Gordon?"

"He's worse than we thought." Tom tapped his shining forehead significantly.

"Loff to let!"

"What—insane?"

"Nothing but echoes in his dome. The town's as empty as his bonnet, too, and the streets are full of snow. It's a sight!"

"Tell me about Mrs. Gordon."

"She's quite a person," said Slater slowly.

"She surprised me. She's there, alone with him and a watchman. She does all the work, even to lugging in the wood and coal—his too busy to help, but she won't leave him. She told me that Dan and Natalie wanted

the game and never get even, while others, like Gordon, quit when the matter how much they lose." Having relieved himself of this fervid homily, Happy Tom unrolled a package of gum and thrust three sticks into his mouth. "Speaking of bad luck," he continued, "when are you going to get married, Murray?"

O'Neil started. "Why—never! It isn't the same kind of proposition as building a bridge, you know. There's a little matter of youth and good looks that counts considerably in the marriage business. No woman would have an old chap like me."

Slater took a mournful inventory of his chief's person, then said doubtfully: "You might put it over, Murray. I ain't strictly handsome myself, but I did."

As O'Neil slipped into his fur coat, after the fat man had slouched out, he caught sight of himself in the glass of his bureau and paused. He leaned forward and studied the careworn countenance that peered forth at him, then shook his head. He saw that the hair was growing gray, that the face was very plain, and—yes, unquestionably it was no longer youthful. Of course he didn't feel old, but the evidence that he was so admitted of no dispute, and it was evidence of a sort which no woman could disregard.

For a week the ice rose slowly, a foot a day, and in spite of the greatest watchfulness it took the false work with it here and there. But concentrated effort at the critical points saved the structure from serious injury. Then the jam in front of Jackson Glacier went out, at least in part, and the

in thirteen days Mellen's crew had laid 400 feet of the heaviest steel ever used in a bridge of this type. But there was no halt. The material for the second section had been assembled meanwhile, and the traveler began to swing it into place.

The din was unceasing. The clash of riveters, the creak and rattle of hoists, the shouts of men, mingled in a persistent, ear-splitting clamor, and foot by foot the girders reached out toward the second monolith which rose from the river bed. The well-adjusted human machine was running smoothly. Every man knew his place and the duties that went with it; the hands of each worker were capable and skilled. But now the hillsides were growing bare, rills gashed the sloping snow fields, the upper gullies began to rumble to avalanches—fore-runners of the process that would strip the earth of snow and ice and free the river in all its fury. In six days 300 feet more of steel had been bolted fast to the complete section, and span No. 2 was in place. But the surface of the Salmon was no longer white and pure; it was dirty and discolored now, for the debris which had collected during the past winter was exposing itself. The ice covering was partially inundated also. Shallow ponds formed upon it and were ripped by the south breeze. Running waters on every side sang a menace to the workers.

Then progress ceased abruptly. It became known that a part of the material for the third span had gone astray in its long journey across the continent. There had been a delay at the Pittsburgh mills, then a blockade in the Sierras; O'Neil was in Qmar at the

timbers beneath the uncompleted span. Hasty measurements showed that the north end of the steel then on the false work was thirteen inches out of line.

It was Mr. Blaine who brought the tidings of this last calamity to Eliza Appleton. From his evident anxiety she gathered that the matter was of graver consequence than she could well understand.

"Thirteen inches in 1500 feet can't amount to much," she said vaguely.

Blaine smiled in spite of himself. "You don't understand. It's as bad as thirteen feet, for the work can't go on until everything is in perfect alignment. That whole forest of piles must be straightened."

"Impossible!" she gasped. "Why there are thousands of them."

He shook his head, still smiling doubtfully. "Nothing is impossible to Mellen and Parker. They've begun clearing away the ice on the upstream side and driving new anchor piles above. They're going to fit tackle to them and yank the whole thing upstream. I never heard of such a thing, but there's no time to do anything else." He cast a worried look at the smiling sky. "I wonder what will happen next. This is getting on my nerves."

Out on the river swift work was going on. Steam from every available boiler was carried across the ice in feed pipes, the night shift had been roused from sleep, and every available man was busied in relieving the pressure. Pile drivers hammered long hours into the river bed above the threatened point. Hydraulic jacks were put in place, and steel cables were run to drum and pulley. The men worked sometimes knee deep in ice water, but they did not walk; they ran. In an incredibly short time the preparations were completed, a strain was put upon the tackle, and when night came the massive false work had been pulled back into line and the traveler was once more swinging steel into place. It was a magnificent feat, yet not one of those concerned in it could feel confident that the work had not been done in vain, for the time was growing terribly short, and, although the ice seemed solid, it was rotting fast.

After the southern half of the span had been completed the warmth increased rapidly. Therefore the steel crew lengthened its hours. The men worked from 7 o'clock in the morning until 11 o'clock at night.

On the 13th, without warning of any sort, Garfield Glacier began moving forward. It had lain inactive even during the midwinter thaw which had started its smaller brother, but that warm spell had evidently had its effect upon the giant, for now he shook off his lethargy and awoke. He stirred, gradually at first and without sound, as it bent upon surprising the interlopers; then his speed increased. As the glacier advanced it thrust the nine foot blanket of lake ice ahead of it, and this in turn crowded the river ice down upon the bridge. The movement at the camp site on the first day was only two inches, but that was sufficiently serious.

The onset of Garfield at this time was, of course, unexpected, for no forward motion had ever been reported prior to the spring breakup. The action of the ice heretofore had been alarming, but now consternation spread. A panic swept the ranks of the builders, for this was no short lived phenomenon. This was the annual march of the glacier itself, which promised to continue indefinitely. A tremendous cutting edge, nine feet in thickness, like the blade of a carpenter's plane, was being driven against the bridge by an irresistible force.

Once again the endless thawing and chopping and gouging of ice began, but the more rapidly the encroaching edge was cut away the more swiftly did it bear down. The huge mass began to rumble, it "calved," it split, it detonated, and, having finally loosened itself from its bed, it acquired increased momentum. As the men with chisels and steamplants became exhausted others took their places, but the structural gang clung to its perch above, augmenting the din of riveters and the groaning of blocks and tackle. Among the able-bodied men sleep now was out of the question, for the ice gained in spite of every effort. It was too late to remove the steel in the uncompleted span to a place of safety, for that would have required more time than to bridge the remaining gap.

Piling began to buckle and bend before that irresistible push. The whole nicely balanced mass of metal was in danger of being unseated. Mellen cursed the heavens in a black fury; Parker smiled through white lips; O'Neil ground his teeth and spurred his men on.

This feverish haste brought its penalty. On the evening of the 14th, when the span was more than three-quarters finished, a lower chord section fouled as it was lifted, and two leading beams at the top of the traveler snapped.

On that day victory had been in sight. The driving of the last bolt had been but a question of hours, a race with the sliding ice. But with the halting apparatus out of use work halted. Swiftly, desperately, without loss of a moment's time, repairs began. No regrets were voiced, no effort was made to place the blame, for that would have caused delay, and every minute counted. Eleven hours later the broken beams were replaced and erection had recommenced.

But now for those above there was danger to life and limb. During the pause the ice had gained, and no effort could relieve the false work of its strain. All knew that if it gave way the workmen would be caught in a shroud of collapsing wood and steel.

From the morning of May 14 until midnight of the 16th the ironworkers clung to their tasks. They dropped their tools and ran to their meals; they gulped their food and fled back to their posts. The weaker ones gave out and staggered away, cursed and lauded by their companions. They were rough fellows and in their deep throat of profanity was a prayer.

(To be Continued.)

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her to come over here, but she couldn't bring herself to do it or let them assist in any way. Gordon spends all his time at his desk, promoting, writing ads. and prospectuses. He's got a grand scheme. He's found that "Hope Consolidated" is full of rich ore, but the trouble is in getting it out, so he's working on a new process of extraction. It's a wonderful process—you'd never guess what it is. He smokes it out. He says all he needs is plenty of smoke. That bothered him until he hit on the idea of burning feathers. Now he's planning to raise ducks, because they've got so much down. Isn't that the limit? She'll have to fit him into a padded cell sooner or later.

"Poor devil!" said O'Neil. "I'm sorry. He had an unusual mind."

Slater sniffed. "I think it's pretty soft for him myself. He's made better than a stand-off—he lost his memory, but he saved his skin. It's funny how some men can't fall. If they slip on a banana peel somebody shoves a cushion under 'em before they light. I never got the best of anything. If I dropped asleep in church my wife would divorce me and I'd go to the electric chair. Gordon robs widows and orphans right and left, then ends up with a loving woman to take care of him in his old age. Why, if I even robbed a blind puppy of a biscuit I'd leave a thumb print on his ear or the dog's mother would turn out to be a bloodhound. Anyhow, I'd spend my declining years nestled up to a rock pile with a mallet in my mitt and a low browed gentleman scowling at me from the top of a wall. He'd lean on his shotgun and say: 'Hurry up, Fat. It's getting late, and there's a lot of oaks to pick.' It just goes to show that some of us are born behind

ice began to fall. Down it settled smoothly, swiftly, until it rested once more upon the shores. It was still as firm as in midwinter and showed no sign of breaking; nor had it moved, downstream a half's breadth. O'Neil gathered his forces for the final onslaught.

On April 5 the last of the steel for span No. 1 reached the front, and erection was begun. The men fell to with a vim and an enthusiasm impossible to describe. With incredible rapidity the heavy sections were laid in place. The riveters began their metallic song. The towering three bent traveler ran smoothly on its track, and under it grew a webwork of metal, braced and reinforced to withstand, in addition to ordinary strains, the pressure of a hundred mile an hour wind. To those who looked on the structure appeared to build itself, like some dream edifice. It seemed a miracle that human hands could work that stubborn metal so swiftly and with so little effort. But every place had been cut and fitted carefully, then checked and placed where it was accessible.

Now that winter had broken spring came with a rush. The snows began to shrink and the drifts to settle. The air grew balmy with every day; the drip from eaves was answered by the gurgling laughter of hidden waters. Here and there the boldest mountain sides began to show, and the tops of alder thickets thrust themselves into sight. Where wood or metal caught the sun rays the snow retreated. Pools of ice water began to form at noon.

The days were long, too, and no frozen winds charged out of the north. As the daylight lengthened so did the working hours of the millers.

On April 15 the span was completed